



Para nuestros niños

National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics

La Comisión Nacional para la Educación de la Niñez Hispana



Expanding and Improving
Early Education for Hispanics

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About the Task Force

Funded primarily by the Foundation for Child Development, The National Task Force on Early Childhood Education for Hispanics was established in May 2004 for the purpose of identifying major educational challenges facing Hispanic children from birth through the primary grades, and to make recommendations for action. Other grants in support of the Task Force have been provided by the Marguerite Casey Foundation, the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, the Peppercorn Foundation, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Additional support has been provided by the Coca Cola Corporation, Scholastic, and the California Community Foundation.



The Task Force briefs &
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The Task Force recommends that private foundations:

- Fund long-term efforts to design, test, and evaluate infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 language and literacy development strategies for Hispanics from all SES levels and from immigrant/nonimmigrant families; and
- Work to create some new foundations that would specialize in funding in these areas, and thereby ensure that sustained investments in strategy development would be made over the long-term.

The Task Force recommends that Hispanic organizations:

- Jointly develop a set of recommendations for specific new or substantially modified approaches to infant/toddler programs, pre-K programs, and K-3 programs for Hispanics that should be tested with funding from the federal government and/or private foundations;
- Jointly develop detailed proposals for state governments for programs to increase the number of English- and Spanish-proficient early childhood educators; and
- Become leaders in providing literacy development information, materials, and other support to Hispanic parents in all SES segments.

The Task Force recommends that education researchers:

- Propose specific combinations of tests of infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 approaches to language development that would provide varying amounts and kinds of such opportunities for low SES children, including low SES Hispanics;
- Suggest a set of tests of English-plus-Spanish (EPS) approaches for the infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 years that would be designed to provide much better information on their effectiveness and their feasibility of use;
- Propose a set of tests of the use of second language acquisition specialists for schools and classrooms in which EPS strategies would not typically be appropriate; and
- Suggest a set of tests of promising strategies, which would be designed to determine the kinds of variations in outcomes that should be expected with their use on a widespread basis over time.



Executive Summary

Expanding and improving the quality of early childhood education for the rapidly growing Hispanic population in the United States should be among the nation's highest educational priorities. Hispanics now constitute one-fifth of the nation's young children (infants through eight-year-olds) and are projected to be a quarter of all young children in the United States by 2030. It is of great concern, then, that Hispanic children lag well behind their White¹ counterparts on measures of school readiness when they start kindergarten, and subsequently achieve at much lower levels in the primary grades. This pattern of lower academic achievement persists through high school and college.

In order to ensure that the United States continues to have a well-educated workforce, it is essential that the achievement differences between Hispanics and Whites be closed as rapidly as possible. It also is essential to do so, if Hispanics are to have the education they need to participate fully in all sectors of our society. High quality early childhood education is key to making this progress.

Foundations of Hispanic Low Achievement

The major reason why levels of school readiness and school achievement are lower for Hispanic children than for Whites is that a high percentage of Hispanic youngsters are from low socioeconomic status (SES) families—families in which the parents have little formal education and low incomes. The situation is complicated further by the fact that a large share of low SES Hispanic children are from immigrant families; and, therefore, many of these youngsters know little English when they start kindergarten. To address these challenges, low SES Hispanic children need excellent preschools and elementary schools, and teachers who can build effectively on their primary language, Spanish.

In addition, Hispanic children from middle class and high SES families are lagging somewhat behind middle class and high SES Whites in school readiness and achievement. Consequently, the need to raise school readiness and achievement levels among young Hispanics cuts across social class lines.

Early Childhood Education Can Make a Difference

Research shows that high quality infant/toddler programs, prekindergarten (pre-K) programs, and kindergarten through third grade (K-3) education can contribute to meaningfully higher levels of school readiness and school achievement among low SES children, including low SES Hispanics. However, gains produced by the most effective strategies to date have generally been modest and, therefore, have only been

able to partially eliminate the readiness and achievement gaps between low SES children and their middle class and high SES counterparts. Also, little attention has been given to developing early childhood education strategies for improving outcomes for middle class and high SES Hispanic children or those from other racial/ethnic groups.

Although infant/toddler programs have demonstrated positive school readiness benefits for low SES children, they have been of limited size in the important area of language development. Therefore, there is a pressing need to design, test, and evaluate new or modified infant/toddler strategies concerned with promoting greater language development for low SES children, including low SES Hispanic English language learners (ELLs).

At the pre-K level, there is growing evidence that low SES children would benefit from having two years of full-day programs. Yet, much remains to be learned about how best to use full-day pre-K for three- and four-year-olds to promote their development, especially in the language arena. How to use this time to foster much greater development in both English and Spanish among low SES Hispanic ELLs is one of the most important unanswered questions about pre-K programs. Moreover, despite the developmental benefits of high quality pre-K, both poor and non-poor Hispanics have long been significantly underrepresented among children who attend center-based programs. Ways must be found to markedly expand Hispanic participation in pre-K.

At the K-3 level, some of the most effective strategies for raising achievement of low SES Hispanics are those that have a strong literacy development focus and a capacity to be responsive to the language and culture of Hispanic children who are ELLs. This finding is consistent with growing evidence that Hispanic ELLs make more academic progress when they are provided with opportunities to learn in both English and Spanish, (referred to here as English-plus-Spanish strategies), rather than being immersed exclusively in English. There also is evidence that multi-year summer programs during the primary grades can raise the achievement of low SES students, but further research and development is needed to determine how best to serve low SES Hispanic children with such programs.

Finally, at all levels of early childhood education, there is a shortage of Spanish-speaking, culturally knowledgeable teachers and teachers who are experts in strategies for helping students master a second language. Developing effective approaches for addressing these teacher supply problems is an increasingly pressing matter, not only in states with large, longstanding Hispanic populations, but also in states where a significant Hispanic presence has emerged more recently.

Reasons for Optimism

There is a compelling and urgent need for our society to mount a much larger effort to expand and improve early childhood education for Hispanics; and, there is also good reason to believe that such an effort would produce positive results. Hispanics are already making some significant educational progress, including achievement gains in the early years of school, and Hispanic families are deeply committed to the educational success of their children. A key to producing greater Hispanic educational progress is to make much better and more extensive use of the effective early childhood education strategies that are currently available, while at the same time taking steps to develop better approaches over time.

Recommendations

Realistically, it will take a generation to build a much more robust early childhood education system for the nation's young, including young Hispanics. Therefore, the Task Force has formulated its recommendations using a 5- to 20-year time horizon. The recommendations focus primarily on increasing Hispanic children's access to high quality early childhood education; increasing the number of Spanish-speaking teachers and language acquisition specialists; and increasing efforts to design, test, and evaluate early childhood education strategies that can strengthen the language and literacy development of Hispanic children. Extensive public and private action will be required. Thus, the Task Force's recommendations are directed to five categories of actors that are playing, or could play, central roles in expanding or improving early childhood education for Hispanics over the next two decades: 1) state governments; 2) the federal government; 3) private grantmaking foundations; 4) Hispanic organizations with a major interest in improving educational outcomes for Hispanic youngsters; and 5) education researchers.

The Task Force recommends that state governments:

- Expand and increase infant/toddler programs in their states that are serving, or have the potential to serve, large numbers of Hispanic children and their parents;
- Continue to expand their state-funded pre-K initiatives, with the objective of creating voluntary universal pre-K systems in most states within the next 10 to 20 years;
- Support efforts to provide information to Hispanic parents on the availability of pre-K programs in their communities;
- Provide school districts in their states with resources to fund multi-year summer programs for their low SES students to attend on a voluntary basis;

- Initiate programs to increase: 1) the number of pre-K and K-3 teachers in their states who are proficient in English and Spanish; and 2) the number of pre-K and K-3 teaching specialists in second language acquisition;
- Support pay and benefit levels for pre-K teachers and administrators that are equal to those of public school teachers and administrators as a means of providing the economic incentives to recruit and maintain a well-educated, reasonably stable group of preschool professionals; and
- Establish information systems that would be used by school districts and state education departments to disaggregate their students into subpopulations defined simultaneously in terms of race/ethnicity, parent education level, family income, generational status (whether they are first, second, or third generation children), and primary language spoken in the home.

The Task Force recommends that the federal government:

- Undertake a substantial expansion of Head Start and Early Head Start that will help ensure that low SES Hispanic children have greater access to high quality infant/toddler and pre-K programs;
- Increase investments in efforts to design, test and evaluate infant/toddler, pre-K, and K-3 language and literacy development strategies for low SES Hispanics;
- Underwrite tests of programs designed to produce large increases in the number of: 1) English- and Spanish-proficient and culturally knowledgeable pre-K and K-3 teachers; and 2) pre-K and K-3 teaching specialists in second language acquisition;
- Create assessments of Spanish language proficiency and development for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age Hispanic children from immigrant families in which Spanish is the primary language of the home, and improve assessments of English proficiency for Hispanic ELLs at the pre-K and K-3 levels;
- Expand investment in longitudinal studies of young children, such as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort, in a manner that allows for much more extensive analysis of Hispanics and other groups that are achieving below U.S. norms; and
- Expand U.S. participation in international assessments of student achievement in a manner that would allow much more detailed monitoring of how different segments of the nation's population compare to students in other industrialized nations.

¹ In this summary, "White" refers to the U.S. Census category "non-Hispanic White."